



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest Service
Northern Region
Kootenai National Forest

Rexford Ranger District
(406) 296-2536
Fortine Ranger District
(406) 882-4451



FIELD NOTES

(Rexford and Fortine Ranger Districts' quarterly newsletter to be distributed in December, March, June, and September)
December 2013
Issue #5

DISTRICT CONSOLIDATION - The Kootenai National Forest is considering consolidating the Rexford and Fortine Ranger Districts into one administrative unit. Public input on the proposal has been requested and will be most useful if received by December 31, 2013. A recommendation will be sent to the Regional Forester early in 2014. Contact Betty Holder at either District for additional information.

THE COORDINATES (The geographic longitude and latitude of a specified location.) - **W**here is and what is **Ten Lakes**? There are four distinct areas with the Ten Lakes name: Ten Lakes Wilderness Study Area (WSA); Ten Lakes Scenic Area; Ten Lakes Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA); and Ten Lakes Basin. The boundaries of the four areas overlap in various locations and are shown on the map on the next page.

Ten Lakes, with all its various boundaries, is a popular recreation destination. The rugged peaks, spectacular views, alpine lakes, abundant wildflowers, potential wildlife sightings, numerous miles of trails, heavy snow in the winter, and huckleberries are inviting to an array of recreationists. Users of the Ten Lakes areas should know that early in 2014 the Districts will release the Galton Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for public comment. This document and subsequent decision will determine how the Ten Lakes areas and several thousand adjacent acres will be managed in the future. The DEIS will contain the effects analysis for four alternatives regarding the possible use and management of the Galton Analysis Area, including the four Ten Lakes areas. Prior to a final decision the Galton project will be subject to the objections process. Following is some specific information regarding the four Ten Lakes areas that was considered in the Galton analysis.



Paradise Lake

In November of 1977 Congress and the President enacted the Montana Wilderness Study Act which designated approximately 34,000 acres as the Ten Lakes WSA. This act required the Forest Service to: 1) prepare a study and recommendation for the President on whether the area should become a Wilderness; and 2) to manage the area to maintain the Wilderness Character as it existed when the Act was passed and its potential for inclusion in the Wilderness Preservation System. The study was completed in 1985 and recommended that approximately 26,000 acres of the Ten Lakes WSA and approximately 7,000 acres of contiguous areas become Wilderness. To date Congress has not designated Ten Lakes as a Wilderness or changed the WSA requirements. Therefore, the Forest Service is still required to manage Ten Lakes WSA to maintain the 1977 Wilderness Character and potential for inclusion in the Wilderness Preservation System. Several District Court rulings have specifically interpreted this to mean that motorized and mechanized uses need to remain similar to what they were in 1977, including occurring in similar locations and with a similar numbers of users. (Continued on next page.)

THE FLORA (*The plants of a particular region or period, listed by species and considered as a whole.*) - **Engelmann spruce** (*Picea engelmannii*) is one of seven species of spruce native to the United States. The tree is named after George Engelmann, an 18th century physician and botanist. Engelmann spruce is one of the largest of the high-mountain tree species. It can be identified by its sharp needles, thin flaky bark, and a tall spire-like crown.

Engelmann spruce is found in all western states, as well as British Columbia and Alberta. The preferred climate is humid, with heavy snowpack during long, cold winters and rainy, short, cool summers. In its favored climatic zone frost can occur at any time of year. Engelmann spruce is most often found growing with subalpine fir. In northwest Montana, Engelmann spruce has been known to successfully hybridize with white spruce. Engelmann spruce has the capacity to grow well at advanced ages. If given sufficient growing space, it will continue to grow steadily in diameter for 300 years, long after the growth of most associated tree species slows down.

Spruce can begin producing cones as early as 15 years, but their most abundant seed production occurs when they are 150-250 years old. New cones ripen in one year, typically by early September, when they open and begin disseminating seed. The seed is very light and can blow or tumble over snow for long distances. Engelmann spruce seeds are among the most viable and germinate best on sites with minor disturbance; they are capable of establishing on sites with either mineral soil or duff and litter. Shade is the most important factor in spruce seedling survival. Other factors that threaten seedling survival include early season frosts and extended summer drought.

Climax forests of Engelmann spruce are not easily displaced by other vegetation; however, fire, logging, and insects have played an important role in their succession and composition. Spruce is susceptible to windthrow due to its shallow root systems. Susceptibility to wind can increase when trees develop in dense stands which are then opened by logging or mortality. Insects that are the most destructive to Engelmann spruce are spruce beetle and western spruce budworm. Damaging spruce beetle attacks are most common following a windthrow event, where downed trees provide ample food supply for a rapid buildup of beetle populations. Extensive spruce beetle mortality occurred locally in the Grave Creek drainage and Boulder area during the 1950's and salvage harvests occurred through the 1960's. Diseases that are known to affect Engelmann spruce are primarily wood rotting fungi, which are most commonly found in the butt of the tree and are introduced through scarring and damage to the trunk. These diseases can also lead to windthrow and wind breakage. Lastly, with Engelmann spruce's thin bark and the persistence of lower limbs, it is susceptible to severe injury and death from fire. However, because of the moist climates where spruce grows, it has less risk from fire than warmer and drier climates.

The largest Engelmann spruce in Montana is found in Flathead County and is 5.4 feet in diameter and 164 feet tall. In 2005, the National Register of Big Trees located the largest Engelmann spruce in the United States in Boise County, Idaho. It is 7.7 feet in diameter and 181 feet tall.



The uses of Engelmann spruce are varied. Spruce habitats provide timber, habitat for many wildlife species, and scenic beauty. Native Americans used Engelmann spruce for weaving into baskets, carving into canoes, roofing for shelters, dressings for wounds or cuts, and chewing for cough control. Spruce lumber, which is light and generally quite strong, is used for home construction and for prefabricated wood products. Other specialty uses include wood for violins, pianos, and airplane parts.

This year's Capital Christmas tree is an 88 foot Engelmann spruce which came from the Colville National Forest. The tree traveled over 5,000 miles from Washington State to Washington, DC. Upon its arrival it was placed in the west lawn of the Capital building and decorated with ornaments made by the residents of its home state. The official tree lighting ceremony was conducted by the Speaker of the House, John Boehner, on December 3rd.

THE OUTDOOR AMUSEMENTS - Information regarding over-snow trails on the Rexford and Fortine Ranger Districts is shared below. Consult the Motorized Over-Snow Vehicle User Map for information on where motorized over-snow use is allowed. The map is available at the Districts and is free of charge.

Trails groomed for snowmobiles by Ten Lakes Snowmobile Club of the Tobacco Valley and Lincoln County Sno-Kats Snowmobile Club of Libby are listed below. Grooming currently occurs 12/1-3/31 in the Grave Creek and Therriault Lake areas. Trails are groomed in the Lost Horse and Big Creek Baldy areas from 12/1-4/30. All grooming is as conditions and the time of volunteers allow and is not guaranteed.

- ♦ 21.1 miles of Grave Creek-Lewis Creek Road #114 and Therriault Lake Roads #319 from Birch Creek to Therriault Lakes
- ♦ 0.8 mile of Bluebird Creek Road #7085
- ♦ 0.6 mile of Big Therriault Lake Road #7116
- ♦ 2.2 miles of Wolverine Creek Road #7086
- ♦ 1.9 miles of Frozen Lake Road #114Y and Weasel Cabin Road #7000
- ♦ 1.5 miles of Weasel Lake Road #7108
- ♦ 4.5 miles of Clarence Creek Road #7022
- ♦ 2.6 miles of Shahl Creek Road #7021
- ♦ 23.4 miles of portions of roads #7183, #665, #336, #4731, #251, #258, and #258A in the Lost Horse and Big Creek Baldy areas

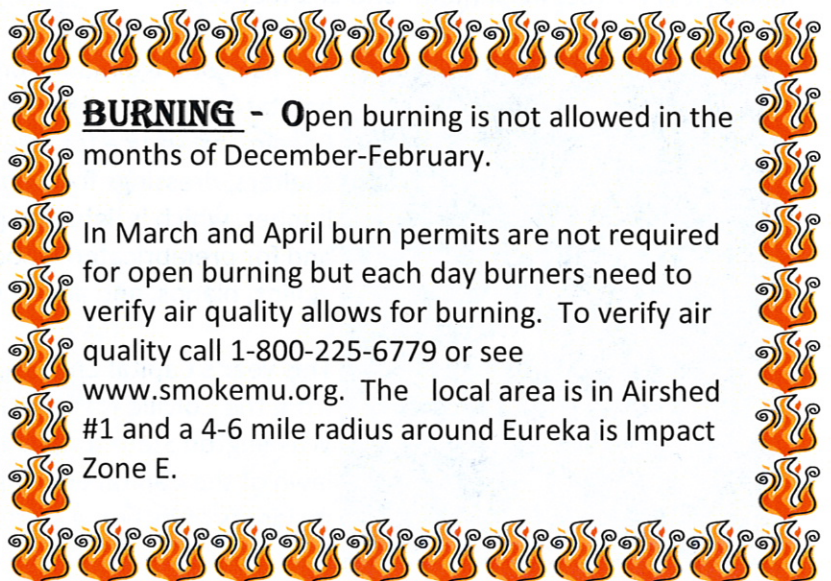
Dave Leeman, a local volunteer, track sets some cross-country ski trails in the Pinkham and Virginia Hill areas throughout the winter as conditions and his time allow. The Districts have free maps of the Virginia Hill trails. Track setting is not guaranteed.

Some popular cross-country skiing areas where track is not set include the Barnaby Mountain area on and beyond roads #7120 and #756, Deep Creek on road #368 and trails #311 and #72, Black Butte on road #7185, Williams Creek on road #7019, and Birch Creek on a trail generally parallel to road #114. Unplowed roads also offer cross-country skiing opportunities and there are many to choose from.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS - In fiscal year 2013 (October 1, 2012—September 30, 2013)

accomplishments on the Ranger Districts included:

- ♦ Replaced bridge on Grave Creek-Lewis Creek Rd
- ♦ Sold 6.2 million board feet (MMBF) of timber
- ♦ Advertised and opened bids on 0.5 MMBF of timber, awarded in fiscal year 2014
- ♦ Re-advertised and opened bids on 2.8 MMBF of timber from a timber sale that had been terminated for non-compliance with the contract, awarded in fiscal year 2014
- ♦ Prepared for sale 6 MMBF of timber which was not advertised because of the lawsuit on the Young Dodge decision
- ♦ Planted 211 acres
- ♦ Pre-commercial thinned 790 acres
- ♦ Pruned 200 acres of western white pine
- ♦ Underburned 657 acres in the wild-land urban interface (WUI) and 160 acres of non-WUI
- ♦ Thinned 133 acres of WUI
- ♦ Contract piled 97 acres of WUI
- ♦ Burned 917 acres of hand and excavator piles in WUI and 9 acres in non-WUI
- ♦ Slashed 102 acres in WUI
- ♦ Treated 842 acres of noxious weeds
- ♦ Cleared 220 miles of trail
- ♦ Re-established the South Fork of Young Creek trail thanks to the years of hard work and dedication of local resident Mark Johnston and his many friends
- ♦ Re-established Banfield Mountain trail with the assistance of the Montana Conservation Corps



BURNING - Open burning is not allowed in the months of December-February.

In March and April burn permits are not required for open burning but each day burners need to verify air quality allows for burning. To verify air quality call 1-800-225-6779 or see www.smokemu.org. The local area is in Airshed #1 and a 4-6 mile radius around Eureka is Impact Zone E.